

Partnership ends in tragedy

Two former Springs women believed to be homicide victims in Oregon

By **Rosemary Harris**
Gazette Telegraph

In Colorado Springs, they led rich, public lives — and closely guarded private ones.

But all that changed once Roxanna "Roxie" Kay Ellis and Michelle Abdill moved to the Western Slope community of Medford, Ore.

When Oregon-based news reports

focused on gay and lesbian rights issues, Ellis, 54, and Abdill, 42, were often out in front — staring into the glare of the television lights, being quoted on the front pages of newspapers.

Now, both are believed dead.

And family members, friends — and the police — fear that the pair's high profile might have exacted this

awful cost.

"This is a serious, serious matter," said Medford Police Department Sgt. Mike Moran.

The two had been missing since Monday, and Thursday two bodies were found in the back of Ellis' pickup truck. Police have tentatively identified the dead women as Ellis and Abdill.

But police did not provide details Thursday on how the women were killed.

So far, Medford police know this: Ellis, a property manager, showed

a man a duplex Monday morning. Ellis' daughter, Lorri Ellis, tried to page her mother several times but didn't get a return call until late that afternoon. Roxie Ellis said she was going shopping. But an hour later, she called Abdill to say that she was at the duplex and her car battery was dead. Abdill left to give her a jump-start.

When Lorri Ellis went by the duplex that night in search of the two, she didn't find either of them. But she did find Abdill's car — undis-

See **MISSING/B4**

By **Kathryn Sosbe**
Gazette Telegraph

Three Colorado Springs men, one of whom now lives out of state, were among 422 people arrested Thursday in a sweeping 15-state federal investigation dubbed "Senior Sentinel," which focused on fraudulent telemarketing schemes.

A federal indictment led to the separate arrests in Colorado Springs of Frank John Kotzain and Fred Hunt Galloway, both 25, according to the FBI. A former Colorado Springs resident, Louis Edward Martin, 26, was arrested by FBI agents in Las Vegas.

The three men are former employees of a San Antonio company that federal investigators have labeled as criminal.

The men worked for one of several companies targeted in

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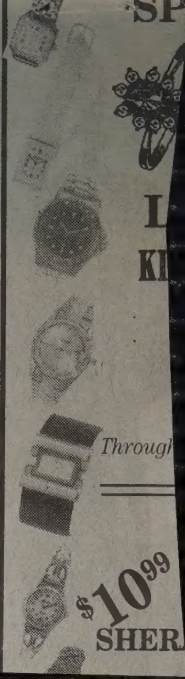
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Missing/Two bodies found in pickup truck

From B1

turbed and with the woman's purse and credit cards inside.

The family called police.

Police officials began looking for the women, the man Ellis had met at the duplex and Ellis' silver Toyota pickup.

They haven't found the man yet.

The pickup was found early Thursday afternoon miles away in a Medford apartment complex parking lot, with two bodies inside.

"This scares the gay community, this scares the real estate community, this scares all the decent people of Medford," said Gerald Garland, a friend of the two who worked with the women in the group PFLAG — Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

"These are very important people to us. They have contributed a lot to our community," he said. "They didn't come here for this; they came to do good things to improve this community. These are good people who came here seeking something; wanting to change things — and look at what has happened."

In Colorado Springs, their lives had been decidedly different.

Ellis, the shy, reserved one, co-owned the Picnic Basket catering company with businessman Harry Staub.

Abdill, her bubbly, outgoing mate, was a nurse's assistant.

Both liked sports. A fun day for them, friends said, might have been passing out Gatorade to runners in a charity race or seeing that a church fund-raiser went off without a hitch.

They shared a northside home. But they were more than roommates. "They were partners in life," a Colorado Springs friend said, requesting anonymity because she fears the scrutiny of being linked to gay rights activists.

"They were normal people. They were upright citizens. They were very quiet."

Another friend said they projected the image of being "just good friends" but people who really knew them knew better. "They were a couple," he said. "Not everyone realized that."

But around 1989, the two decided that Colorado Springs was too closed a com-

munity to lead the kind of lives they favored.

Ellis and Staub sold the catering business that year. By November 1990, the two women had sold their home, as well — for much less than they had paid for it. "They wanted to go to Oregon where Michelle's family lived," the friend said. "Michelle wanted to be close to her mom and help her run the business."

They settled in Medford, a city of 55,000, 300 miles south of Portland. Abdill joined her family in running the Annette Abdill Real Estate School.

She opened a new business with Ellis, too: ESP Property Management.

Almost immediately, they took on a high profile, joining gay rights groups and fighting anti-gay rights initiatives.

They joined the First United Methodist Church in Ashland, which had taken the lead in extending itself to lesbians and gays.

"It was like moving here was their emancipation," said a friend in Ashland. "The closet just wasn't a place where they wanted be."

Associated Press



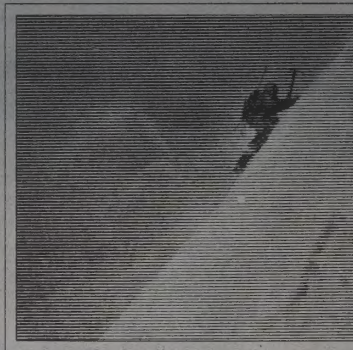
Roxanne Ellis, left, and Michelle Abdill were reported missing Monday. Two bodies were found Thursday in Ellis' truck.

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